DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 395 731 RC 020 520

AUTHOR Crawford, James
TITLE Seven Hypotheses on Language Loss Causes and Cures.
PUB DATE 96
NOTE 19p.; In: "Stabilizing Indigenous Languages"; see RC 020 517.
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Acculturation; *American Indian Languages; *Attitude Change; Bilingual Education; Community Action; Elementary Secondary Education; *Language Attitudes; *Language Maintenance; Language Usage; Social Attitudes; Values
IDENTIFIERS *Language Shift; *Native Americans

ABSTRACT

Objective evidence indicates that despite public fears and the claims of those who would make English the official language of the United States, it is not English, but minority tongues that are threatened in this country today. In the last 5 years, educators have noticed a sharp decline in native language skills among Native American children. Despite the end of punitive English-only policies and the advent of bilingual education, the shift to English is accelerating in many Indian communities. Seven hypotheses related to this shift are presented, drawing on historical research into U.S. language policy and anecdotal observations in Native American communities. First, language shift is very difficult to impose from without. Second, language shift is determined primarily by internal changes from within language communities themselves. Language choices are influenced, consciously and unconsciously, by social changes that disrupt community. These dislocations include demographic factors, economic forces, mass media, and identifiers of social status. Third, language shift reflects changes in social and cultural values, including the encroachment of individualism, pragmatism, and materialism. Examples of factors in language shift are offered for Navajo, Hualapai, Pasqua Yaqui, and Mississippi Choctaw. Fourth, efforts to reverse language shift must also involve a change in values. Fifth, language shift cannot be reversed by outsiders but depends upon community action. Sixth, successful strategies for reversing language shift demand an understanding of the current stage of language loss. Finally, at this stage, the key task is to develop indigenous leadership. (SV)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

ED 395 731

Seven Hypotheses on Language Loss Causes and Cures[1]

James Crawford

After reporting on bilingual education and the English-only movement for the past ten years, I am still amazed by the enormous gap between popular attitudes about language and scientific realities about language, as documented by researchers and educators. Especially ironic is the claim that the dominance of English is threatened in the United States today by the encroachment of other tongues. Many Anglo-Americans worry that minority language speakers are refusing to assimilate, owing to the influence of ethnic separatists and to government programs such as bilingual education, bilingual voting, and bilingual social services, which appear to enable people to live here without learning English. Since the early 1980s, such fears have nourished a movement to declare English the official language at both state and federal levels. Without such legislation, its advocates warn, U.S. national unity will be eroded as language diversity continues to increase and the hegemony of English continues to decline. This perception is widespread, as reflected by public opinion polls and by statements from the new Republican leadership in Congress, which now insists that English needs "legal protection" — that is, legislation to make it the sole medium of government functions.

Objective evidence, however, indicates quite the reverse. It is not English, but minority languages that are threatened in this country. Back in the early 1980s, the demographer Calvin Veltman (1983) completed the most extensive analysis of linguistic assimilation ever conducted in the United States. He concluded that, without the replenishing effects of immigration, all languages other than English would gradually die out in this country, with the possible exception of Navajo. And, I regret to report, Veltman would probably drop that qualifier today, following two decades of rapid erosion for Navajo and other Native American languages.

How do we know when a language is threatened? One obvious sign is that the number of its speakers is declining, as exemplified by most Native American and "old immigrant" (i.e., European) languages in the U.S.A. Other symptoms include:

---

[1]This paper is adapted from a speech given on May 4, 1995, at the second Symposium on Stabilizing Indigenous Languages held at Northern Arizona University. Copyright © 1996 by James Crawford. All rights reserved.

RC 020520

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

- fluency in the language increases with age, as younger generations prefer to speak another (usually the dominant societal) tongue;
- usage declines in "domains" where the language was once secure — e.g., in churches, cultural observances, schools, and most important, the home;
- growing numbers of parents fail to teach the language to their children.[1]

When I first started writing about bilingual education in the mid-1980s, language loss was not perceived as a major problem among tribes such as the Navajo, Hualapai, Crow, and Tohono O'odham, which still have large numbers of native speakers, at least among

---

[1]These more subtle indicators of loss, which are evident in most if not all minority language communities in the U.S.A., are usually overlooked by Anglo-Americans, especially those who are alarmed by the rising populations of immigrants. They have trouble grasping the paradox we face today. On the one hand, language diversity is increasing rapidly because of two demographic factors: (1) relatively high levels of immigration, following half a century of tight immigration restrictions, and (2) higher birth rates among non-English-speaking groups, who are younger, on average, than the general U.S. population. So speakers of certain minority languages, notably Spanish, are projected to increase substantially over the next twenty years.

On the other hand, the shift toward English is proceeding more rapidly than ever before. While the number of immigrants is increasing, these new arrivals are losing their languages at record rates. Around the turn of this century, it typically took three generations for this "Anglicization" process to occur among newcomers to our shores; now, according to Veltman, we are approaching a two-generation model of linguistic assimilation. This is true even for fast-growing languages such as Spanish. Among the children of Hispanic immigrants, 70 percent become dominant or monolingual in English, although this trend is typically masked by the continual arrival of new Spanish-speaking immigrants. It is quite noticeable, however, in areas where relatively few newcomers are settling (e.g., northern New Mexico, where Spanish is fighting for survival, notwithstanding its viability there for nearly four centuries).

For Native Americans, of course, the problem is even more acute. Since their languages are indigenous to this continent, there are no reinforcements coming in from elsewhere. For native peoples, language loss is forever. Moreover, I would argue that this phenomenon — while harmful to any community — is especially devastating to indigenous cultures, which rely heavily on oral traditions.

adults. But in the last five years or so, educators are noticing a sharp decline in native language skills among the children of these tribes.

It seems that even when good things happen in educational programs, there is not much impact on the rate of language loss. Despite the end of punitive English-only policies in Indian schools and the advent of bilingual education, especially since the mid-1970s, the shift to English is accelerating in many Indian communities. Why is this happening now?

At the outset it should be noted that, so far, no one has developed a comprehensive theory of language shift — what causes it under widely varying conditions, what prevents it from happening, what can help to reverse it — although I believe that Joshua Fishman has gone farther than anyone else in doing so. Linguists in general have neglected this area; finally a number of them are beginning to wake up to the fact that Native American languages are fast disappearing. According to Michael Krauss (1992), 45 of the 175 still spoken in the U.S.A. are likely to be extinct by the year 2000.

In presenting my working hypotheses about this crisis, I will draw on both historical research into U.S. language policy and my own anecdotal observations in Native American communities, which illustrate some of the many and varied factors involved in language shift. These will be drawn from my visits to reservations in the past year to talk with people about prospects for language revitalization.

1. Language shift is very difficult to impose from without. We know that languages can die. Can they be "murdered"? I'm sad to say, looking at the Americas since the arrival of Columbus, that the answer is yes. Nevertheless, this crime is more difficult to commit than many believe. The one sure-fire way to murder a language is to murder its speakers. Genocide of language communities occurred with Tainos in the Caribbean, the first peoples to be encountered by Columbus. It has also been the fate of a number of others since that time — most famously the case of Ishi, the last speaker of Yana, whose tribe was systematically hunted down and killed by California settlers in the late 19th century. Ishi himself survived until 1916, living out his last years in an anthropology museum in San Francisco.

More often, however, languages die in a more complex and gradual way, through the assimilation of their speakers into other cultures. We know lots of the factors involved — the once-repressive language policies of the Bureau of Indian Affairs are often cited, along with other attempts at cultural genocide, the advent of English-language media, and so on — but these mechanisms have not been studied extensively. We do know that, in the past, this process has taken quite a long time, often several generations, as a community goes through transitional stages of bilingualism. As I noted, however, the pace of language shift

appears to be accelerating dramatically in late 20th century America, which is a major cause for concern.

My first hypothesis is that the external forces that are often blamed, especially direct attempts to suppress a language, cannot alone be responsible, for the simple reason that people resist. Language is the ultimate consensual institution. Displacing a community's vernacular is equivalent to displacing its deepest systems of belief. Even when individuals consent to assimilation, it is enormously difficult to give up one's native language. This is especially true as we grow older, because language is tied so closely to our sense of self: personality, ways of thinking, group identity, religious beliefs, and cultural rituals, formal and informal. Such human qualities are resistant to change at the point of a gun; witness the survival of indigenous tongues through centuries of colonialism.

Let us look at the historical record of United States Indian education policies and analyze their role in language shift. Following the advice of the Indian Peace Commission of 1868, the United States Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) embarked on a conscious attempt at cultural genocide. There are numerous statements on record from Commissioners of Indian Affairs who speak explicitly about the need to "blot out barbarous dialects" and substitute English in their place, so as to "civilize the Indians" and contain them on reservations (Atkins, 1887). Coercive assimilation was seen as a less expensive and more humane alternative to military action. Boarding schools were set up for this purpose beginning in 1879.

The BIA's policy was not simply an outgrowth of racism, although clearly racism played a significant role. It grew out of a school of thought known as social evolutionism: simply put, the idea that human cultures evolve through predetermined stages, from "savagery" to "barbarism" to "civilization." According to this theory, it was both natural and desirable for "lower" cultures to die out and be replaced by "higher" cultures — and for "lower" languages to be replaced by "higher" languages. This was the orthodox view among late 19th century anthropologists and linguists, as exemplified by John Wesley Powell, who explored the Colorado River, learned to speak several Native American languages, and founded the Bureau of American Ethnology. Powell believed that humanity was evolving toward a single world language. As an amateur linguist, he wanted to study Native American languages before they died out, although he viewed them as primitive and had no other regrets about their impending extinction (Powell, 1881).

At the same time, the BIA saw nothing wrong with helping this "natural" process along. It rationalized the policy of repressing indigenous languages by arguing that Native Americans' interests were best served by becoming "civilized," even through forcible means. By

the late 1880s, the agency mandated English-only rules for all Indian students, including those in religious schools. This policy was bitterly opposed by certain missionaries, who had long ago discovered the effectiveness of using native languages for both educational and religious purposes. But the missionary schools, which received substantial funding from the federal government, ultimately lost this battle (Indian Office, 1888).

In words of Lt. Richard Henry Pratt, architect of the BIA boarding school system, the educational strategy was "Kill the Indian . . . and save the man" (Pratt, 1973[1892]). Killing the language was seen as a necessary means to this end. By insulating children from any kind of Indian influence, Pratt believed they could be indoctrinated with the same culture, values, and language as white Anglo children. But this proved far more difficult than he had anticipated. Sometimes the English-only policy worked with young children if they were removed from their communities, kept at a remote boarding school for several years, and punished for speaking anything but English; naturally they would tend to forget their tribal tongue. The BIA's plan was for these students to graduate, return to the reservation, and convert their tribes to "civilized" norms, eventually to include speaking English. This seldom occurred. Either the returning students were shunned for their alien ways, or they soon returned to the traditional culture of their tribe (Reyhner & Eder, 1989).

Federal officials soon became impatient with the pace of change, and Pratt's optimism about remolding the Indian fell out of favor. It was replaced with theories of racial inferiority that pronounced Native peoples as incapable of full assimilation, an indictment that was directed at certain immigrant groups as well. Accordingly, after 1900 BIA education policy began to focus more heavily on manual arts and to lower expectations for academic achievement among Indian students (Hoxie, 1984). Still, it did not waver in its English-only policy until the 1930s, when John Collier became commissioner of Indian affairs.

Collier was far more respectful of Indian cultures, religions, and languages than his predecessors, and in 1934 he ordered the BIA to stop interfering with them. The new commissioner even authorized some experiments with bilingual instruction among the Navajo and other tribes. But these faltered for a lack of teachers who were proficient in the native language (i.e., Indian teachers) and because of budget cuts brought on by World War II (Szasz, 1977).

Collier also tried, without much success, to promote adult literacy in Navajo. This had seemed like an ideal plan to BIA officials, who were simultaneously promoting an unpopular program of stock reduction to conserve the soil. With a strong faith in the written word, the bureaucrats hoped that if government directives could be distributed in Navajo, they would somehow have more persuasive power and

Navajos would acquiesce in the reduction of their herds? This did not prove to be the case; neither reading nor stock reduction caught on. Some people believe that the BIA's initiative actually soured Navajos on the idea of learning to read and write their language by associating Navajo literacy with an unpopular and dictatorial government program. Meanwhile, despite Collier's policy changes at the top, many BIA schools continued to maintain English-only rules and to punish students for violating them well into the 1950s, apparently without much interference from Washington.

What was the overall impact of English-only policies on language choices? To my knowledge, no one has systematically studied this question, although there is no shortage of anecdotal evidence. Many people cite the BIA boarding schools, with their coercive approach, as the number one factor in Indian language loss. But as Wayne Holm (personal communication, 1994) has pointed out, from his vantage point at the Navajo Division of Education, many tribal members who hold this view — people who attended BIA schools themselves — remain fluent speakers of Navajo, although often their children do not. Most, if not all, of the boarding school "survivors" I have interviewed recall proudly their defiance of English-only rules, even at the risk of harsh punishments.

Some people believe that the boarding school experience has had a delayed effect, inducing shame among many Indians about their culture or at least convincing them that their languages are a source of educational difficulties. So, on becoming parents themselves, they have raised their children only or mostly in English, believing this would help them in school. In my observation, such practices are not uncommon among Indian parents even today. But the question remains: did negative attitudes toward the native language come primarily from repressive BIA policies or from other messages that Indians receive from the dominant culture?

Holm notes that language loss among Navajos began to accelerate in the 1970s and 1980s, among children whose parents started school in the 1950s and 1960s, by which time public schools greatly outnumbered BIA schools on the reservation. While using English as the sole medium of instruction, public schools generally did not practice repressive language policies. Moreover, they promoted an ideology quite distinct from that of BIA schools — one more in line with modernity, economic development, and social integration. These latter forces affect traditional cultures in more insidious, and perhaps more devastating, fashion than direct coercion. Hence my second hypothesis:

2. Language shift is determined primarily by internal changes within language communities themselves. No doubt these changes frequently take place in reaction to external pressures — or

"dislocations," to use Fishman's useful term. Such factors weaken the bonds that hold communities together. Yet ultimately speakers themselves are responsible, through their attitudes and choices, for what happens to their native language. Families choose to speak it in the home and teach it to their children, or they don't. Elders choose to speak the language on certain important occasions or to insist on its use in certain important domains, or they don't. Tribal leaders choose to promote the tribal language and accommodate its speakers in government functions, social services, and community schools, or they don't.

This is not to say that such decisions are made in a vacuum, or that they are entirely deliberate. Language choices are influenced, consciously and unconsciously, by social changes that disrupt the community in numerous ways. These include the range of dislocations Fishman (1991) has cited, such as:

Demographic factors. In- and out-migration disperses a community — for example, when people have to leave a reservation to attend school or look for jobs. Mobility often leads to intermarriage with other language communities, which in turn means English will likely become the common language of the household. In addition, we should not overlook the forcible dispersion of certain tribes through genocidal campaigns — for example, in California, a state that also refused to establish reservations for most tribes, which might have provided space for language communities to regroup. It is no coincidence that indigenous tongues in California are among the most endangered in the U.S.A.

Economic forces. Opportunities for employment and commerce tend to be open only to those fully proficient in the dominant language. This is increasingly true when a wage economy starts to replace an agricultural economy and when isolated markets become integrated into a consumer society. It used to be that trading post operators had to be proficient in languages such as Navajo to deal with rural Indians; today it is the Indians who must accommodate to the English-dominated marketplace.

Mass media. Television and video cassette recorders have had a noticeable cultural impact among Native Americans. In more remote areas this has happened only in the last decade. With increased electrification and satellite dishes popping up everywhere, Indian children are suddenly watching MTV, listening to heavy metal, and playing video games — none of which makes any use of their native language. Perhaps more important, electronic media have displaced traditional pastimes, such as the winter stories through which elders passed down tribal history and culture, with passive forms of entertainment.

Social identifiers. We speak like those we admire or aspire to emulate. Native Americans who desire to succeed in professional careers or who feel an attraction to popular (i.e., Western) culture or non-native religions often come to identify with the language of those pursuits — English — and to ascribe low status to native languages. Such tendencies are especially strong among the young, who increasingly identify with non-Indian role models.

These are the kinds of dislocations that occur when barriers fall between the tribal society and the dominant society, when indigenous language communities no longer live in isolation. This has happened earlier on some reservations than on others, but the basic process is pretty much the same. Dan McLaughlin of Navajo Community College put it very well when he said, "You pave roads, you create access to a wage economy, people's values change, and you get language shift" (Crawford, 1995). This brings me to my third hypothesis.

3. If language choices reflect social and cultural values, language shift reflects a change in these values. Language loss is affected not merely by attitudes about language per se (e.g., whether or not to try to keep the ancestral tongue alive). If such values were all that were involved, saving endangered languages would be a lot simpler. More important in this process are larger systems of belief:

Individualism — putting self-interest ahead of community interest. Ambitious individuals tend to ask: How is honoring the old ways going to help me "get ahead"? Other people can do what they want, but my family is going to stress English, the language of success in the dominant society.

Pragmatism — worrying about "what works," not about defending principles that may seem old-fashioned or outmoded. Pragmatists reason that, as indigenous languages decline in power and number of speakers, they are no longer "useful." With English taking their place in more and more domains, they no longer seem worth maintaining.

Materialism — allowing spiritual, moral, and ethical values to be overshadowed by consumerism. The attitude is that indigenous languages won't put bread on the table, so why worry about preserving them? Teaching them to children is a waste of time, and time is money.

The encroachment of these Western ways of thinking, the dominant thought patterns in U.S. capitalist society, has a great deal to do with language shift in native communities.[1] Once these viewpoints were

[1] At the same time, I want to distance myself from the view, fashionable in some quarters today, that all Western ways are by definition oppressive and reprehensible. American democratic ideals, such as respect for human rights and minority self-determination, while not consistently observed in practice, nevertheless provide openings to rally the public's support for language preservation.

kept out by social, economic, and geographical distances. Although the U.S. government tried repeatedly to implant them — for example, the Dawes Severalty Act of 1887 mandated private land ownership to teach Indians "selfishness, which is at the bottom of civilization" (Debo, 1940) — such ideologies failed to take root in isolated communities; indigenous values and belief systems were too strong.

No more. Technological advances, another byproduct of Western values, have made it increasingly difficult for tribes to insulate themselves from the wider society. Traditional cultures have never been more threatened. In visiting various reservations last year, I found many of these dislocations in community and shifts in basic values to be in evidence. But another interesting thing I discovered is that each native community has its own story, quite distinct from those of other tribes. I would like to share briefly my observations from four of these reservations.

Navajo. As I noted, there has been a rapid erosion in the native language among young Navajos over the past twenty years. This is true even in two communities that remain relatively remote, Rough Rock and Rock Point, Arizona, which also happen to have highly regarded bilingual education programs. As recently as the mid-1970s, more than 95 percent of children starting in these programs spoke Navajo, and most spoke little or no English. Today, according to teachers and school administrators, only about half of the newly arrived kindergartners are orally fluent in the native language (although at Rough Rock this estimate is disputed).[1] In border towns and other large communities, of course, children's fluency in Navajo is considerably lower. A reservation-wide study of Navajo Head Start programs reported that teachers judged 54 percent of preschoolers to be monolingual in English, 18 percent monolingual in Navajo, and 28 percent bilingual (Platero, 1992).

There now seem to be few stable domains for Navajo, daily contexts where it can function without being challenged by English. Because many younger people cannot speak the native language, or cannot speak it well, there is social pressure to use English much of the time. This is true in tribal government and even at Navajo Community College, where Benjamin Barney tells me that English largely predominates — except in his teacher-training program.

Some of this language shift has conscious roots. Opposition to bilingual education has been fanned by some fundamentalist Christian groups, who fear its potential to encourage Navajo religion. In addition,

---

[1] It should be noted that these assessments are based on teachers' observations rather than on an objective test. Some administrators believe that the percentage of Navajo speakers is considerably larger at the Rough Rock Community School.

some parents have been convinced that learning the native language is a distraction from learning English and other school subjects. But I believe these are minority sentiments. The vast majority of tribal members, if asked, would favor keeping Navajo alive. The problem is that people seldom get around to doing anything about it, for example, by teaching the language to their kids. Why is this so?

For one thing, there is little sense of urgency about language loss because there are still so many Navajo speakers left. The 1990 census counted more than 100,000 on the reservation, although no doubt that figure overestimates the number who are fully proficient. At the same time, a growing number of Navajos, generally middle-aged or older, are becoming concerned about language shift among the young. Yet many of these people, including most of the language activists I have met, concede that their own children have grown up without learning Navajo. Now, even if they would like to do so, these young adults cannot seem to find the time in their busy lives, so a disparity exists between good intentions and practical efforts to preserve the language.

Meanwhile, there are significant differences in attitudes between generations. Among Navajo youth the native language tends to have very low status — lower than on any other reservation I visited. It is frequently associated with rural backwardness, with people who are not making it in today's society. There is even a slang epithet for such Navajo speakers: "Johns." I happened to visit the elementary school at Chinle on the same day as some Navajo code talkers. These Marine veterans, who played a crucial role in winning World War II in the Pacific, are a great source of pride to adult members of the tribe. One of the code talkers, Carl Gorman, asked students in a 6th grade class how many could speak at least a little Navajo. At first, not a single hand went up. After some coaxing, about half of the children put up their hands. Clearly, speaking the language was not something they were very proud of. I regard that as an ominous sign for the long-term health of Navajo.

Hualapai. This is another case where the native language has been rapidly disappearing among younger generations. At Peach Springs, Arizona, only 50 to 60 percent of entering kindergartners speak Hualapai fluently today, as compared with 95 percent in the mid-1970s. Many young adults — the parental generation — are themselves no longer fluent in the language. Nevertheless, it is still heard throughout the community. The majority of families still have elderly members who speak Hualapai as their dominant tongue; so children are often exposed to it in the home. But that, too, is changing, as new HUD housing has tended to break up extended families.

A special factor that seems to promote the shift to English is the problem of dialect differences in Hualapai. Until about a century ago, the Pai comprised fourteen bands spread over an enormous territory,

basically the entire northwestern quadrant of Arizona. While they spoke essentially the same language, geographical dispersion produced a distinct dialect for each of the bands, which continued to live separately until about a generation ago. Then, in the 1950s and 1960s, most of the Pai (except for the Havasupai and Yavapai, who have their own reservations) relocated in Peach Springs. Today, with a population of about 1,500, it is the only residential community on the Hualapai reservation. Not surprisingly, after only a generation or so, dialect differences remain quite obvious.

While lack of standardization is a problem in many tribes, often provoking spirited discussions, it has created special complications among the Hualapai. People are naturally loyal to their native dialect (as we all tend to be) and often engage in ridicule about each others' linguistic "errors." Such joking is usually taken in stride by those who are fully proficient in Hualapai. But for those who are not, especially teenagers and young adults, it creates a lot of self-consciousness. Several of the latter told me that they hesitate to speak the language for fear of being criticized. It is safer to speak English, because nobody cares about alleged errors in English. In addition, a small minority in the community objects to the dialect of Hualapai used in the Peach Springs school, notwithstanding the bilingual program's international acclaim.

A final factor favoring language shift among Hualapai is that the school only goes to the 8th grade (though they are now working on getting their own high school). Students have to go off the reservation — usually to Kingman, 60 miles away — to continue their education. There they tend to speak much less Hualapai; the high school has no bilingual classes. More important, their social environment changes, and so they often meet and marry people from outside the tribe.

Pasqua Yaqui. Concentrated in southern Arizona, Yaquis are relatively recent arrivals to the U.S.A. Their traditional homeland is in the Mexican state of Sonora, where they long lived apart from Spanish speakers, even after the Jesuits converted them to Catholicism. Then, in the late 1800s, the dictator Porfirio Díaz tried to wipe them out. Over the next thirty years, many Yaquis (who refer to themselves as *Yoeme* in their native language) crossed the border to become refugees in and around the urban centers of Tucson and Phoenix. The U.S. government, however, regarded them as illegal immigrants. Their status was not truly settled until the 1970s, when they were granted tribal recognition and a reservation near Tucson. While the Border Patrol was aware of the Yaquis' existence, it generally paid them little attention. Blending into Chicano barrios, they were also difficult to detect, since they looked Mexican and usually spoke more Spanish than English. At times, however, tribal members (including some who had been born in the

U.S.A.) were caught up in mass deportations, which continued periodically until the 1950s.

So speaking their native language, Yoeme, in public was often quite risky for Yaquis. Children were counseled by their parents not to do so for fear that the family would be turned in and shipped back to Mexico. While this helped to ensure the survival of the tribe, it worked against survival of the language.

In recent years the Yaquis have begun assimilating into the Anglo culture, as have many of the Hispanics in Tucson and Phoenix. Over the last two or three generations there has been a massive language shift. According to a recent census conducted by a Felipe Molina, a Yaqui writer and lexicographer, only about 6 percent of the 8,500 tribal members remain fluent in the native language. Virtually none of these are children. In Marana, Arizona, a relatively isolated community I visited last year, the youngest Yoeme speaker was eighteen years old.

There is still some cause for optimism, however: Yoeme remains quite viable in Sonora, where children are still learning the language in isolated Yaqui villages. One of the Tucson schools has organized cultural exchange programs for Pasqua Yaquis and their relatives in Mexico. There are also hopes for joint economic development projects between the two groups, thanks to the North American Free Trade Agreement, something that could make Yoeme a valuable economic as well as cultural resource.

Mississippi Band of Choctaw. This relatively small branch of the Choctaws, with about 5,500 tribal members (versus nearly 43,000 in southeastern Oklahoma) is far from isolated geographically. Yet it has an extremely high rate of retention of the native language: at least 90 percent among children entering school. Meanwhile, fluency in English is also widespread. The Mississippi Choctaws represent a rare example of *diglossia*, or stable bilingualism, in which a single speech community uses two languages for distinct purposes.

Tribal government, tribal business enterprises, and the tribally controlled school system operate mainly if not exclusively in English. Although there was a federally funded bilingual program back in the 1970s, it proved unpopular with the community and was soon terminated. For its part, Choctaw is used extensively in social, ceremonial, and family life. This is the only reservation I visited where I encountered groups of teenagers hanging out with each other speaking their native language, without teachers or other adults cajoling them to do so.

How did this situation develop? Most informed observers believe that the key factor has been social isolation. The reservation is located near Philadelphia, Mississippi, a town that became world famous for white racism when three civil rights workers were murdered there in 1964. (Visiting the town close to the 30th anniversary of the crime, I

could not detect much remorse among local whites; whereas hostility toward outsiders was palpable.) Choctaws were the first of the eastern tribes to experience forced "removal" from their homeland in the 1830s. Those who evaded the move and stayed behind in Mississippi enjoyed few if any civil rights. Kept out of public schools and discriminated against in many other ways, they developed a strong ethic of self-reliance and self-isolation. Assimilation was never an option for them until quite recently; nor is it an aspiration today. The Choctaws needed to learn English to deal with local whites to some extent, but they have developed their own parallel institutions; hence the tendency to retain Choctaw.

All this may be changing quite soon. In the last fifteen years the tribe has pulled off a kind of economic miracle, starting its own factories and commercial businesses and, most recently, a casino. The Mississippi Band of Choctaw is now the third largest private employer in the state, bringing numerous English speakers to the reservation for jobs in construction and other tribal enterprises. So the tribe is now forced to interact more with outsiders. Elders are already beginning to see changes in the use of Choctaw and to initiate conscious efforts to preserve the language.

To return to my working hypotheses: What kinds of effective strategies can we identify for language preservation?

4. If language shift reflects a change in values, so too must efforts to reverse language shift (RLS). According to Fishman (1991), "successful RLS is invariably part of a larger ethnocultural goal." As examples one might cite the movement for national autonomy in Catalonia or the class struggles of Mayan peasants in Chiapas. In these cases language preservation is not an isolated objective, but a part of broader social changes.

The question for us is: What kinds of ethnocultural goals would advance the cause of endangered Native American languages? It is one thing to come up with creative ideas about language preservation, as the brainstorming sessions did in the first Symposium. It is quite another to organize people to adopt and practice such ideas consistently. That will require strategy and tactics for remolding attitudes, which in turn will necessitate a better analysis (tailored to each individual community) of why people make the choices they now do.

Again, while specific language attitudes may be easy to change — or perhaps community members already agree in principle about the importance of preserving their native tongue — the more difficult task involves a broader realignment of values to combat forces such as individualism, pragmatism, and materialism.

How do fundamental changes in values occur? Either individuals' lives change in radical ways, or they experience a religious conversion, or they are influenced by a social movement that speaks directly to

long-suppressed needs and aspirations. In this case I believe a social movement will be necessary, one that addresses questions that matter to Native Americans, no doubt in the context of struggles for self-determination — cultural, economic, and perhaps political as well.

5. Language shift cannot be reversed by outsiders, however well-meaning. As Michael Krauss (1992) has written, based on long experience directing the Alaska Native Language Center, "You cannot from the outside inculcate into people the will to revive or maintain their languages. This has to come from them, from themselves." If language preservation efforts are to succeed, they must be led by indigenous institutions, organizations, and activists.

Schools, by contrast, are usually regarded as an outside institution in Indian communities, unless they are under effective local control. As experience has shown, establishing such control is easier said than done, even when tribes or communities contract to run their own schools. The frequent need to hire outside expertise can mean sacrificing power over things that are important to tribal members. Generally speaking, outside administrators bring with them their own agendas. The only way to avoid this trap is to train native talent to perform these jobs.

Even where there is effective local control, schools can only do so much. Again, it is hard to translate good intentions into action — not unlike the situation in many homes. Everyone agrees the native language needs to be preserved, but English still tends to predominate, even in bilingual education programs, unless domains are consciously defended for the former. When I visited Rough Rock, I heard lots of concern about this problem among teachers, who wanted to create "a totally Navajo environment" at least part of the time. Otherwise, they felt an overpowering tendency to lapse into English.

Another obvious problem is dependence on federal funding, unfortunately a universal phenomenon in Indian education and one that fosters program instability. For example, Title VII bilingual education grants were designed not as a permanent entitlement, but as seed money to get programs started, promote experimentation, and build local "capacity" to make them self-supporting. On reservations, however, alternative resources are usually lacking. So when the grant ends after three to five years, so does the program in many cases.

Moreover, in the U.S.A. bilingual education has developed largely as a transitional approach for assimilating immigrant children. The vast majority of such programs make no attempt to preserve the native language after the student learns English. Until recently the best Indian bilingual programs have had to bend the law to combine native language maintenance with learning English.

Finally, even where there has been a concerted effort to maintain and develop bilingual skills, such as at Peach Springs and Rock Point,

language shift has proceeded rapidly. One reason is that these programs were not originally designed to prevent language loss, which was not perceived as a problem twenty years ago on the Hualapai and Navajo reservations. Another reason is that tribal members outside the schools have yet to become mobilized to keep their languages alive. According to Lucille Watahomigie, director of the Peach Springs program, parents often assume that "the schools can solve that problem" rather than seeing the need for a "partnership" between school and community (Crawford 1995).

There are two other educational approaches we are going to be hearing about at this Symposium, which promise to address the problem more directly: two-way bilingual education, as practiced at Tuba City, and early immersion, a model that Wayne Holm inaugurated at Ft. Defiance. These types of programs, designed to conserve Native American languages, are now eligible for funding under the 1994 amendments to the Bilingual Education Act — thanks in large measure to skillful maneuvering by Bob Arnold, formerly on the staff of the Senate Select Committee on Indian Affairs.

It is still premature to gauge how effective these approaches are going to be in practice. While they have yielded excellent results with children whose languages are not severely threatened, it is unclear how they will work in a context of rapid language shift. And, I regret to add, it is uncertain how much longer the federal government is going to fund any kind of bilingual education.

The Republican-controlled 104th Congress seems intent on cutting Title VII, along with numerous other programs serving Indian students. Meanwhile, English-only legislation has a better chance of passage in this Congress than ever before. One such bill, H.R. 123, already has 182 cosponsors in the House, including quite a few Democrats. While particulars vary, most versions of the so-called "Language of Government Act" would jeopardize all programs serving language minorities, including those dedicated to language preservation now provided by the Administration for Native Americans, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the National Park Service, the National Science Foundation, and of course, the Office of Bilingual Education and Minority Languages Affairs.

But looking on the brighter side, I do not believe that large-scale federal funding is crucial to language preservation efforts today. Small amounts can be quite helpful, of course. Witness the catalytic effect of the Native American Languages Act, whose paltry $1 million in grants last year went a long way toward generating enthusiasm for tribal projects. Still, it seems to me quite feasible to raise sums of this magnitude from nongovernmental sources, such as private foundations, corporate donors, and of course, tribes themselves. Lavish grants might even lead us down blind alleys (although this claim is unlikely to be

tested in the foreseeable future). Fortunately, at this stage the most promising approaches are extremely low-tech. This brings me to a key hypothesis of Joshua Fishman's that bears repeating:

6. Successful strategies for reversing language shift demand an understanding of the stage we are currently in. What is appropriate in one community, with a certain degree of language loss and a certain level of consciousness about the problem, is unlikely to be appropriate in another community where these conditions differ. Timely solutions are crucial, whereas untimely ones are worse than useless; they can be counterproductive. At present, I would argue that investing heavily in CD-ROM technology and language-learning software would be a foolish diversion of resources, that organizing mass demonstrations to demand additional support from government would be a waste of time and energy, and that convening a summit meeting of tribes to write manifesto on the subject would likely lead nowhere. While each of these tactics might be useful at a different stage, in my view none would be useful today, when we lack definitive answers to the question, What is to be done?

In short, there is a need to put first things first. While there are lots of creative ideas out there, no one has yet developed a comprehensive strategy for preserving Native American languages. The promising models, techniques, and tactics that do exist are inadequately disseminated. So, for the most part, they remain unknown to the majority of Indian educators and community activists. What, then, is necessary to move things forward?

7. At this stage in the U.S.A., the key task is to develop indigenous leadership. Most of the issues I have discussed today could be called "objective factors" — forces outside our conscious control that affect language shift and its reversal. These are the factors that must be studied and understood before any effort at social change can succeed. I believe that now is the time to concentrate on the "subjective factor" — on building a movement that can exert an influence on behalf of endangered languages. This will mean centralizing available information about what is already being done, organizing discussions about strategic directions for our work, and, most important, fostering leadership from endangered language communities themselves.

Outsiders cannot lead this movement, although they can serve as helpful allies. No doubt linguists and educators can be instrumental, both in providing technical assistance to language preservation efforts and in serving as ambassadors to the U.S. government and the American public about the importance of such work. But with a few exceptions, and I am referring mainly to Native American linguists and educators, academic people are not situated to play direct leadership roles. Outside allies (and I count myself in this group) can contribute

most by providing resources, training, and encouragement to indigenous language activists.

It is heartening to see the growing enthusiasm for language preservation work throughout Native American communities. I have encountered it on reservations, in schools, and at some excellent and well-attended conferences in the last few months — for example, the Native American Languages Issues Institute, organized last fall by Gloria Emerson. Projects are popping up all over the country. Yet so far there is no central forum for discussion or organization for moving things forward.

Without such a vehicle, today's momentum could soon be lost. Now is not the time for summit meetings or mass organizing or expensive technology projects. Now is the time to develop our brain trust; to facilitate communication among activists (e.g., through conferences, publications, and the Internet); to compile resource guides and how-to-manuals that share practical experiences (failures as well as successes); to train Indian linguists and educators; to build alliances with sympathetic outsiders; and of course, to encourage talented and committed people to get involved.

In closing, I would note that a high proportion of today's Indian language activists tend to be tied to educational institutions of one kind or other. Educators have served as a kind of early warning system about language loss. And it goes without saying that they are both well situated and usually well qualified to help address this crisis. Certainly, there are important contributions to be made in the schools, but not only in the schools. Broader community-wide efforts are essential in restoring and expanding safe domains for indigenous languages. It is here in particular that we should be seeking out and encouraging new activists. I hope this Symposium will lead us at least a few steps down that road.

References

Atkins, J.D.C. (1887). Annual report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs. Rpt. in James Crawford, ed. (1992). *Language loyalties: A source book on the official English controversy* (pp. 47-51). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago.

Crawford, James. (1995). *Bilingual education: History, politics, theory, and practice*. 3rd ed. Los Angeles, CA: Bilingual Educational Services.

Debo, Angie. (1940). *And still the waters run: The betrayal of the five civilized tribes*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University.

Fishman, Joshua. (1991). *Reversing language shift: Theoretical and empirical foundations of assistance to threatened languages.* Clevedon, England: Multilingual Matters.

Hoxie, Frederick E. (1984). *A final promise: The campaign to assimilate the Indians, 1880-1920.* Lincoln, NB: University of Nebraska.

Indian Office, U.S. (1888). *Correspondence on the subject of teaching the vernacular in Indian schools.* Washington, DC: Government Printing Office.

Krauss, M. (1992). Statement of Mr. Michael Krauss representing the Linguistic Society of America. In U.S. Senate, *Native American Languages Act of 1991: Hearing before the Select Committee on Indian Affairs* (pp. 18-22). Washington, DC: Government Printing Office.

Platero, Paul R. (1992). *Navajo Head Start language study.* Abridged version. Window Rock, AZ: Navajo Division of Education.

Powell, J.W. (1881). *First annual report of the Bureau of Ethnology to the Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, 1879-80.* Washington, DC: Government Printing Office.

Pratt, Richard Henry. (1973). Official report of the nineteenth annual Conference of Charities and Correction [1892]. In F. P. Prucha (Ed.), *Americanizing the American Indians: Writings by the "Friends of the Indian," 1880-1900.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University.

Reyhner, Jon, & Eder, Jeanne. (1989). *A history of Indian education.* Billings: Eastern Montana College.

Szasz, Margaret Connell. (1977). *Education and the American Indian: The road to self-determination since 1928* (2nd ed.). Albuquerque: University of New Mexico.

Veltman, Calvin. (1983). *Language shift in the United States.* Berlin: Mouton.